

**Newfields School District
First Session of the 2021 Annual Meeting
Deliberative Session – February 10, 2022**

School Board Members: -Chairman Tom Hayward, Jane Walsh and Jacqui Tassinari

NES Principal: Suzie Griffith

Assistant Superintendent: Christopher Andriski

SAU Attorney: Peter Bronstein

Asst. Director of Finance: Michele Larson

Moderator: John M. Hayden

School District Clerk: Sue McKinnon

Supervisor of the Checklist: Brittney Thompson

Moderator John Hayden called the meeting to order at 6:35pm. He called for a pledge of allegiance and introduced the head table. Additionally, he reviewed the rules and procedures of the meeting.

Article 1. To see if the school district will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$2,820,954? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$2,875,391, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Newfields School Board or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. The Newfields School Board recommends \$2,820,954. (Majority vote required)

Tom Hayward indicated that the budget has increased .5%. He commended Principal Suzie Griffith and Chris Andriski for doing a great job keeping the budget as low as possible while still providing an adequate budget.

Kerri Gosselin asked where the increases were being allocated to. Michele Larson said that the increase of \$13,986 is going to several different line items.

Michael Sununu asked the student population. Suzie Griffith stated that the current population is 120, which is an increase over last year. Tom Hayward added that a couple of years ago the population was 106 students.

Michael Sununu asked for confirmation that the number of classes have not changed just the number of students in the school. Tom Hayward said that is correct.

Bobby Kelly mentioned that the default budget is not the same as last year's operating budget. Michele Larson explained that this year's default budget includes contractual increases and mandatory items, voted on by the voters last year. The default budget is higher than the proposed budget for this year.

Kerri Gosselin was concerned with the total number of staff for the 120 students in the school. There appears to be a ratio of one teacher for every 6 to 7 students. Including a remote teacher.

She remembers when classes had 25 students in them, and we had to pay for our children to attend Camp Sargent. Every year the budget increases with less students attending. She asked if there was any consideration taken into cutting a position or in having fewer busses.

Chris Andriski commented that the school does not have a remote teacher and not all employees are full time. There is one teacher per classroom and two teachers for kindergarten with 15 students per class.

Kerri Gosselin asked if there was a way to cut back. We have to shoulder the burden of the added Exeter Cooperative costs and most of the tax base comes from the school. The administration is paid very well. A diversity person was recently hired at a cost of \$153,000. The SAU is not being looked upon very favorably and she is concerned with the quality of the education.

Chris Andriski stated that they put together a program adequate for the staff and students and this is the budget they are proposing.

Kerri Gosselin mentioned that she calculated that it costs us \$27,000 per student. The cost per student at the Montessori school is \$8,378, the cost at Sacred Heart is \$6,700 per student and Portsmouth Christian Academy, the best school in the state, is \$13,305 per student. We are a small town, and this is a lot of money.

Michael Sununu explained that there are two teachers for kindergarten and one teacher for each grade level. The issue is one that is binary. The school has one teacher per class. The addition of five students per class does not change that. The cost per student is dictated by the student population. The school has the minimum number of teachers, and the budget is at bare bones. If the student population increases the per student cost decreases.

Chris Andriski mentioned that if the student population increased, they would look to shift a teacher between grades so that they wouldn't have to add an additional teacher.

Mike Price mentioned that the cost per student is deceptive because there could be five kids added to each class and then the cost per student would drop.

Phyllis Mackey commented that she is a retired therapist who has worked in the school system and with children with IEP's and 504 plans. The costs involved with a public school system is different. Parochial schools are private. It's like comparing apples to oranges.

Michael Sununu asked about line 2800-Support Services, Central and Other and whether we have control of that number.

Michele Larson stated this line is made up of a myriad of items which can be viewed on SAU 16 website. Michele said it includes retirement, teachers' health insurance, fica, etc.

Amy Barry commented that the level of teacher quality for public educators is different than private educators and is highly regulated by the State. Our teachers are master level educators who require additional requirements for professional development annually. It is not the same as the private schools.

Jennie Bishop said she is the sole member of the budget advisory committee, and she did approve this budget. The Board did look at the population and number of teachers, and increased costs in general. The position of the Curriculum Coordinator was put into place in the event there is an influx of students, they would be able to pull from those resources.

Mike Grant asked for some examples of what the Board decided to remove from the budget to keep it low and if they were concerned with any of those decisions.

Chris Andriski said some staff services we funded by a grant. They were able to reduce costs projected in the facilities plan. They identified a surplus in supplies and did not add for additional supplies. They consolidated some professional development and combined resources for trainings so as not to impact the voters.

Kerri Gosselin asked why the transportation line increased from \$91,000 to \$105,000 and if it was necessary to have two busses. Also, food services have gone from \$34,000 to \$41,000 and now it is \$49,000. It seems like a big increase to her. She would like to spend some of that money on a grant development person to get some of our money back. The Cooperative budget is huge, and the administration gets bigger every year. She would like to see some legitimate cuts.

Chris Andriski indicated that food costs are up nationally, and the school is not part of the federal lunch program. The federal lunch program would be a larger cost impact with the need to hire additional staff based on federal regulations. Transportation actually went down, and the two busses are necessary to bus the students to and from school.

Bobby Kelly wanted to acknowledge that the Board did look into the federal food program, and it was not viable for Newfields. Jane Walsh added that it was a significant expense and was not fiscally responsible to implement for the size of the school. The only schools in the district that make money from the program are the larger schools; CMS and EHS.

Mike Grant asked about the anticipated tax rate implications. Is there a budget surplus that would be applied to this year's budget? Michele Larson stated the operating budget increase calculates to .04 per thousand and the \$49,971 warrant article is about .16 per thousand on the tax rate. Surpluses go right back into the funds.

Article 1 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 2. To see if the school district will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Newfields School Board and the Newfields Staff Association which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level:

Fiscal Year Estimated Increase 2023: \$49,971
2024: \$38,798

and further to raise and appropriate \$49,971 for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. The Newfields School Board recommends \$49,971. (Majority vote required)

Tom Hayward said the Board is happy with the negotiated contract for the staff. The staff was great to deal with considering the last two years have been difficult. Staff expectations were raised at the school and huge gains were made. The increase was fair at 3% this year and 2% the next two years.

Michael Price asked if the Newfield's teachers are still the lowest paid in the district.

Tom Hayward said that wages are similar to other smaller towns in the district. The teachers are being adequately compensated. We are lucky they do not leave. Some teachers are getting older and will be retiring. We will need to think about being comparable in the district when new teachers are brought in.

Brian Johnson said in light of trying to keep high quality teachers should we be looking at paying higher amounts with inflation at over 7%.

Tom Hayward replied that a 7% increase is unrealistic and wouldn't be fair to the taxpayers.

Mary Belanger commented that she appreciates the Board keeping the taxes low. She is concerned with the fact that Newfields Elementary is being ranked at 107th in the state.

Chris Andriski said it depends on what ranking you are looking at. The website Mary Belanger referred to was published by private citizens and not operated by SAU 16. Our state testing data is on the NH DOE website if anyone wishes to learn more about the different rankings that are being reported. He would be glad to discuss it at a future board meeting.

Article 2 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 3. Shall Newfields School District, if article 2 is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting, at its option, to address article cost items only? (Majority vote required)

This article is self-explanatory. There was no discussion.
Article 3 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 4. To see if the school district will raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000 to be added to the School Building Maintenance Fund established at the 1992 School District meeting for the purpose of repairing and maintaining school buildings? This sum to come from the June 30 fund balance available for transfer on July 1. No additional amount to be raised from taxation. The Newfields School Board recommends approval. (Majority vote required)

Tom Hayward indicated that surplus funds every year are placed into the Building Maintenance Fund as a proactive measure, for unexpected costs.

Jane Walsh mentioned she would like to add the words, "up to" to the warrant article to allow up to \$10,000 to be placed into the fund, if it is available in the fund balance.

The balance of the fund is \$37,848. Tom Hayward said that recently the boiler in the school was replaced at a cost of \$70,000.

Jane Walsh commented that the article is a small insurance policy for emergency funds. It is not used “ad hoc”.

Chris Andriski added that funds in the operating budget would be used first for building maintenance. They would draw from the Building Maintenance Fund when necessary.

Mike Grant asked if an assessment of all the equipment had been done. Chris Andriski replied that a 5-year plan was formulated after assessing all systems, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, etc.

A motion was made by Jane Walsh and seconded by Mike Price to add the words, “up to” to the warrant article to allow up to \$10,000 to be placed in the fund. The motion to amend was voted on and passed.

Article 4 shall be placed on the ballot as amended.

Article 5. To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$10,000.00 to be added to the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund previously established. This sum to come from June 30 fund balance available for transfer on July 1. No additional amount to be raised from taxation. The Newfields School Board recommends approval. (Majority vote required)

Tom Hayden indicated that the fund is used for unexpected Special Education costs. There was no discussion.

Article 5 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 6. To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of up to \$10,000 to be added to the Safety and Security Capital Reserve Fund previously established. This sum to come from June 30 fund balance available for transfer on July 1. No additional amount to be raised from taxation. The Newfields School Board recommends approval. (Majority vote required)

Mike Grant asked for an explanation of the Safety and Security Fund. Chris Andriski explained that these funds have been used for security cameras in and around the school, including the playground and parking lot, keyless entry cards, and the vestibule.

The meeting adjourned at 7:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue McKinnon
Newfields Town Clerk